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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000502

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT DECLARES THE PRESIDENT
PERSONA NON GRATA IN LATIN AMERICA

REF: CARACAS 00444

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

11. (C) The National Assembly criticized the President's upcoming trip to Latin America by unanimously adopting a resolution on March 6 that declares the President "persona non-grata" in Latin America and rejects any attempts by him to thwart regional integration and counter Venezuela. Senior Venezuelan officials are characterizing the trip as an attempt to isolate Venezuela in the region as well as an arrogant show of imperialism to "deceive" and "further subjugate the people." President Chavez also lashed out at the President's March 5 comments drawing similarities between George Washington and Simon Bolivar. End Summary.

National Assembly Resolution Against the President's Trip

12. (U) On March 6 the National Assembly (NA) passed a resolution presented by NA Deputy Aurora Morales (Fifth Republic Movement (MVR)- Miranda) rejecting the President's trip to Latin America. Specifically the NA agreed to:

-- Reject any interference ("injerencia") and pressure that is directed at disrupting the advances Latin American people and their sovereign governments have made toward economic, social, cultural, and scientific integration, or those related to deepening democracy, strengthening citizen participation in public affairs, and self-determination.

-- Reject any pretense to isolate the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela or President Hugo Chavez through this trip and convoke the people to be alert and mobilized before the new manipulations of the "Empire."

-- Consider the President Persona Non-Grata in Latin America.

13. (U) The discussion on the resolution afforded Assembly members the opportunity to bring out a number of well-worn anti-American themes, including condemnation of the history of U.S. intervention in the region, and calls for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and ending the embargo on

Cuba. Several NA deputies suggested that if the USG were serious about working with the region, it would extradite Luis Posada Carriles and free the five convicted Cuban spies incarcerated in federal penitentiaries. There were also several suggestions for local demonstrations on March 8 and 9 to protest the trip. El Nacional has subsequently reported that National Assembly deputy Marelis Perez Marciano (MVR-Monagas) has announced a march to the Ministry of People's Power for Information and Communication to protest the President's trip as well as Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) programming deemed "offensive" to women. A number of other pro-Chavez groups have announced anti-trip rallies and marches for March 8 and 12 as well.

Washington-Bolivar Parallels Anger Chavez

14. (SBU) Chavez continues to comment on the President's upcoming trip almost daily (Ref A) and was particularly perturbed by the President's March 5 Washington speech to the Hispanic Chamber linking George Washington and Simon Bolivar. During his March 6 "Alo Presidente" show, a clearly annoyed Chavez alternated between sarcasm and vitriol, joking at one point that since "Bush is now a Bolivarian, (he) would send him a red beret" (a common symbol of Chavez supporters). He also said the President's remarks were a "slap in the face," "showed a great cynicism, and reflected a profound ignorance of the reality that (Latin) American people live." He responded with "Bush Go Home!" to the President, whom he also called the "king of cynicism, king of lies, and a man of war." Chavez also called on the President to withdraw from Iraq and not to "disrespect" the people of Latin America.

Comment

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15. (C) By giving Chavez the authority to usurp their legislative function for the next 18 months through ruling by decree, the National Assembly is largely relegated to passing non-binding anti-US resolutions. It is ironic that a government that criticizes the United States for its "imperialist tendency" of pretending to speak for the region, has now taken the same liberty by declaring Bush persona non grata in all of Latin America. Chavez' thin-skinned response to the President's references to Simon Bolivar and the U.S. social agenda in Latin America underscore Chavez' hypersensitivity--and vulnerability--to U.S. comments on themes that he has made part and parcel of Bolivarian mythology.

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